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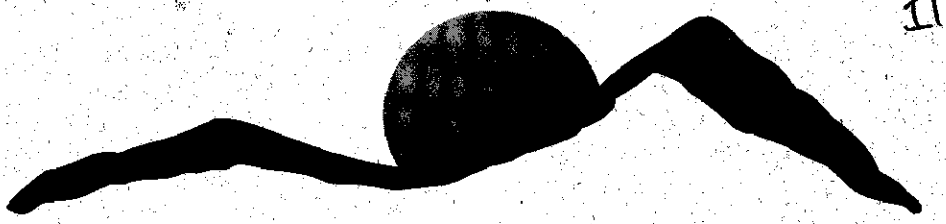

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION LEAGUE
F O U N D A T I O N

July 28, 1997

Ms. Kate Hansel
CALFED Bay-Delta Program Office
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Hansel:

The Planning and Conservation League (PCL), in collaboration with University of California fishery biologists and water resource engineers from Harza Engineering Company, is interested in performing a study to assess the feasibility of restoring the steelhead and salmon fishery in the upper basins of the American River watershed, an idea we first proposed to CALFED in June of 1995. Since then, the idea appears to have become a high priority item for CALFED.

The June 12, 1997 CALFED "American River Technical Team Meeting Report", for example, lists evaluation of the technical feasibility of reintroducing steelhead above Folsom Dam as a high priority recommendation for Category III funding. The study also underscores the need for a number of closely related projects that would benefit steelhead and chinook salmon, including a Folsom Dam Temperature Control Device, Folsom Reservoir Cold Water Pool Management, and Flood Control Channel Improvements.* Because each of the items noted in the Technical Team Meeting Report would be critical to our proposed study, we believe that this study can directly advance important CALFED Bay-Delta Program objectives.

Based on our previous investigations, we believe the upper American can provide suitable habitat for steelhead and salmon. We wish to investigate this biological question in more detail and then address the engineering, financial and political means for reintroducing these fish to their historic habitats.

This Inquiry Submittal is intended to notify the CALFED Bay-Delta Program staff of our interest in pursuing Category III funding for our proposed study and to elicit your assessment of the suitability of the scope of work we envision. If you believe our general concept is suitable, we would particularly welcome comments from staff that would aid us in preparing a formal proposal that would conform with the objectives of Bay-Delta Program and that would be

* Harza Engineering Company, under contract with the Bureau of Reclamation, was closely involved in performing various engineering studies for the recently installed TCD at Shasta Lake.

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submitted in January 1998. We would use the time between now and next January to raise matching funds to support this project, plan the scope of work, and develop a full proposal.

Background

Prior to development, the three main forks of the American River offered a highly productive habitat that supported spring, summer and fall run chinook salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha) and summer steelhead rainbow trout (O. Mykiss). Now no anadromous fish ascend the American River above Nimbus Dam and the river supports only a relic fall chinook fishery downstream of the dam. The current fishery is sustained by juvenile fall chinook from Nimbus Hatchery plus some natural river recruitment.

Major emphasis will be placed on the biological requirements of restoring the steelhead fishery because most of their historic spawning and rearing habitat is now upstream of the dams. Spring-run chinook will also be a priority species for this study.

Approach

Our planned approach is divided into four closely coordinated, iterative activities.

1) identification, coordination, and discussion with local stakeholders;
2) assessment of the biological requirements for fishery restoration;
3) engineering studies to develop and evaluate options for fishery restoration that are supported by the stakeholder community; and
4) identification of potential funding sources for project implementation.

Each of the four activities is described briefly below:

Stakeholder Coordination. This effort will focus on determining how groups and individuals who would be affected by changes in management of the American River will likely react to various alternatives for restoring the American River fishery. For example, since spring-run salmon and summer steelhead seek deep pools of cool water, rafting on the South Fork of the American River may disturb fish introduced to this area.

A goal of stakeholder coordination will be to determine, early in the study, the degree of acceptance likely to be given to various river management options. In particular, elimination of elements that are unacceptable to stakeholders will narrow the field of alternatives to those containing elements which have been well received by stakeholders.

Biological Assessment. This activity will focus on field studies to begin in the late spring or early summer of 1998 as flows permit. The field work will include a survey of the South and Middle Forks followed by a survey of the North Fork. Field results and information from previous studies by Peter Moyle will enable our fishery biologists to work closely with stakeholders and engineering staff to develop initial management elements and to help guide the evolution of alternatives as some elements are discarded while others are retained and refined based on stakeholder response.

Engineering Studies. Based on review of earlier studies and on our own reconnaissance of Nimbus Dam, Folsom Dam, North Fork Dam and the Auburn Dam diversion tunnel (performed in August, 1995) we believe that there are no fundamental engineering obstacles to moving adult steelhead and salmon to the upper basin nor to moving juveniles downstream. However, while introduction of adult fish into the upper basin and movement of juveniles from the upper basin appear to be possible technically, critical questions remain about how best to effect these transfers; what impact various options may have on important stakeholders; what the costs of these options are likely to be; and whether restoration of the American River fishery would compare favorably with other restoration options seeking support from the Bay-Delta program and other sources. Engineering activities would center on defining basic alternatives that would satisfy the biological requirements for reintroducing steelhead and salmon and strengthening alternatives that are favored by stakeholders.

Identification of Funding and Development of Consensus Around An Acceptable and Achievable Plan. If the process followed in the first three alternatives leads to the conclusion that there are one or more options that would 1) be successful in reestablishing the fishery, and that 2) enjoy broad stakeholder support, the final stage of the study would be to develop feasibility level cost estimates for these alternatives and to investigate funding strategies. These options would be presented to the stakeholders for comment and, following final discussions with stakeholders, a feasibility report would be produced that presents the preferred option or options and describes avenues for funding and implementing the fishery restoration.

We look forward to your comments on this proposed study.

Sincerely,

Gerald Meral, Ph.D.
Executive Director
PCL Foundation

Peter Moyle, Ph.D
Professor of Fisheries Biology
U.C. Davis

David Miller, Ph.D., P.E.
Manager,
Water Management Services
Harza Engineering Company

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